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The experiences of grandparents raising grandchildren in Indonesia

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Article information:

To cite this document:

Rista Fauziningtyas, Retno Indarwati, Delisa Alfriani, Joni Haryanto, Elida Ulfiana, Ferry Efendi, Nursalam Nursalam, Khatijah Lim Abdullah, (2018) "The experiences of grandparents raising grandchildren in Indonesia", Working with Older People, <https://doi.org/10.1108/WWOP-10-2018-0019>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/WWOP-10-2018-0019>

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The experiences of grandparents raising grandchildren in Indonesia

Rista Fauziningtyas, Retno Indarwati, Delisa Alfriani, Joni Haryanto, Elida Ulfiana, Ferry Efendi, Nursalam Nursalam and Khatijah Lim Abdullah

Abstract

Purpose – *The raising of grandchildren by grandparents is a global phenomenon, and it is common in Indonesia. This is because parents are often unable or unwilling to raise their own children. However, the debate around “grandparenting” is still limited in Indonesia. The purpose of this paper is to gain a better understanding of the experience and views of grandparents on “grandparenting.”*

Design/methodology/approach – *The methodology employed was qualitative and informed by phenomenology. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with 13 grandparents who were raising their grandchildren who were under five years old. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis.*

Findings – *5 main themes and 13 subthemes emerged from the analysis of the data. The themes were responses, strategies for overcoming negative responses, the grandparents’ role, the reason for raising grandchildren, and the cultural aspect of “grandparenting” in Java. All of the grandparents enjoyed their roles as grandparents. They felt that they helped fulfill their grandchildren’s physical and educational needs.*

Social implications – *The experience of raising a grandchild can be both positive and negative, depending on the cultural aspects in the Java and the family as a whole system. Grandparents require healthcare and informal support to maintain their well-being.*

Originality/value – *This paper provides new insights into “grandparenting” closely related to social and cultural aspect within the community. Grandparents enjoy being a part of the Javanese tradition. The supportive role of grandparents in Indonesia is important. However, older adults need to balance the role of “grandparenting” and rest time so that they remain healthy and happy.*

Keywords Family, Experiences, Grandchildren, Grandparent, Javanese, Older adult

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

“Grandparenting” affects the physical and emotional health of the grandparent. There is a positive effect on mood, social inclusion and cognition in the grandparent. However, attention should be paid to the intensity and time spent on “grandparenting” (Campbell *et al.*, 2016). Studies in the USA, China, and Europe explained that grandparents serve as an important form of support for multigenerational families and as the centers of intergenerational solidarity models (Chen and Liu, 2012; Hayslip, 2014; Muller and Litwin, 2011; Uhlenberg, 2009). The National Centre for Family and Marriage (NCFMR) recognizes that grandparents are important caregivers for their grandchildren. In the research conducted by Peter Uhlenberg (2009) in the USA, it was known that grandparents can provide resources by parenting their grandchildren.

The increasing life expectancy and the older adult population have affected the possibility of grandparents providing full care or care assistance of their grandchildren (Landry Meyer and Newman, 2004). Furthermore, the shifting roles of parents in recent decades, especially the double burden of working mother reduced the intensity of childcare, so mothers’ needs extended family involvement in parenting, especially from the grandparents. Another factor that causes the grandparent to raise grandchildren is crisis in the family (Chen and Liu, 2012; Goodman and Rao, 2007).

The authors thank for all the participants who have participated in the research.

The data collected by NCFMR stated that in the USA, the percentage of children living with their grandparents in 2010 was 7.3 percent, twice as high as the percentage in 1970 (3.2 percent). Nearly, a third (29 percent) of them live in the grandparents' homes without their mothers or fathers (Wilson, 2013). In the UK, there are nearly 14 m older adult, and most of them are grandparents. Approximately 17 percent of grandparents with grandchildren under the age of 16 provide intensive care for at least 10 h a week and about 1 in 30 older adult individuals provide full care or live with their grandchildren (Wellard, 2011, 2014). The number of older adults raising their grandchildren in Indonesia is unknown. A preliminary survey conducted through interviews with an older adult cadre^[1] in RW 2^[2] Tambakaji Village, Semarang City on September 1, 2017 obtained information from as many as 115 people. The data indicated that 50 older adults in this area raised their grandchildren.

Research on the experience the grandparent who raised their grandchildren is still limited in Indonesia. The exploration of this subject is very interesting, especially regarding the role of the grandparent when raising grandchildren, the reasons for raising the grandchild, their responses and the Javanese cultural view in "grandparenting." This study aims to explore the experience of Javanese grandparents in Indonesia raising their grandchildren. In addition, the objective is to make a significant contribution to the research discussing "grandparenting," as well as to address the adverse outcomes of "grandparenting" on the welfare of grandparent mentioned in the literature.

Methodology

The qualitative methodology used in-depth interviews with grandparents to explore the grandparents' experiences when caring for grandchildren. The qualitative methodology allows researchers to hear the participants' own perspective (Creswell, 2012). The particular approach was chosen to identify the meaning of life experience (Creswell, 2013). This study used Husserl's phenomenology to explore the experience of grandparents who raised their grandchildren. Husserl's phenomenology is transcendental because it adheres to what can be discovered through reflection on the subjective acts and their objective correlates. Transcendental phenomenology is the scientific study of the appearance of things, of the phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in our consciousness. Every one of these "phenomena" can be a suitable starting point for reflection (Theodorou, 2015).

To minimize the researcher bias, the researchers wrote a reflective diary in the entire research process starting from the data collection and analysis. Reflection is a thought process that helps the writers to identify things that can potentially influence the process and results of the research (Chan *et al.*, 2013). The reflective diary was used to write down the author's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about "grandparenting" when conducting the research. This allowed the researchers to re-examine their position when problems arose that might affect the research process (Chan *et al.*, 2013; Tufford and Newman, 2012).

Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling among grandparents (both of grandfather and grandmother or one alone) in Semarang City, Indonesia. A snowball sampling technique was employed. Grandparents who were known by the researchers were approached and asked to recommend others grandparents as potential participants. The inclusion criteria of participants in this study were as follows: the (non-custodial) grandparent cared for their grandchild every day and spent at least 8 h daily on parenting, the grandparent raised only one grandchild under five years old. We choose grandparents who were raising only one grandchild, as if they were parenting more than one grandchild, then the experience of the participants might have been different. The grandparents, parents, and grandchildren lived together in the same house. Both of the grandchildren's parents were still alive. The participants included 13 Javanese grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. The recruitment of the participants was discontinued once the data saturation point was determined by the 13th participants. A summary explaining the characteristics of the participants and their grandchildren can be found in Table I.

Table I The characteristics of the grandparents and grandchildren

Characteristics	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Grandparents</i>		
Gender		
Female	11	73
Male	2	13
Marital status		
Married	4	27
Divorced	9	60
Age (years)	63.87	
Education		
Less than junior high school	4	27
Complete junior high school	3	20
Senior high school	2	13
College and graduate degree	4	27
<i>Grandchildren</i>		
Gender		
Female	7	47
Male	5	33
Age (years)	3.4	

Procedure

The interviews were scheduled at the participants' homes at a convenient date and time, involving both the grandparents and the authors. After a discussion regarding their approval and confidentiality, the grandparents were asked brief demographic questions about their grandchildren (e.g. gender and age). Then, an in-depth interview with the grandparents using six open-ended questions (with additional questions if necessary) was conducted in order to gain information on the grandparents' experience while nurturing their grandchildren. The interview lasted for 15–45 mins and was recorded.

Measures

The interview guide consisted of a series of open-ended questions for the grandparents, designed to allow the participants to "tell their stories" about their experience while parenting. The interview questions were developed based on parenting research focused on grandparents (Clottey *et al.*, 2015; Goodman and Rao, 2007; Kelch Oliver, 2011; Leung and Fung, 2014). In addition, the empirical knowledge of the writer about the grandparents and the family was used in the creation of the interview questions. A demographic questionnaire (created by the author) was used to obtain basic demographic information (e.g. gender, race, age, education) about the grandchildren and their grandparents.

The interview questions posed to the grandparents in this study were as follows: how do you experience raising your grandchildren? (your role, responses, reason for making the decision to raise your grandchildren, strategies for overcoming responses)? How do you view "grandparenting" from the perspective of the Javanese culture?

Data analysis

The data were analyzed and interpreted using the Colaizzi's method. This method was chosen because of its advantages compared to other methods. The advantages of this method are that the data can be clarified with the participants (Creswell, 2012, 2013). The steps of the process of data analysis using the Colaizzi's method were as follows. Step 1: describe the phenomenon under study. The researchers gained the perception of "grandparenting" by enriching the information gained through reading the results of research from books. Step 2: gather the description of the phenomenon through the participants' opinions. The researchers

conducted and transcribed interview so they could describe the perception of “grandparenting” Step 3: read the entire descriptions given by the participants about the phenomenon being studied. The description of the participant’s interview results were arranged in a verbatim script form. The verbatim script was synchronized between the sound recording and field notes so that the verbatim script contained the participant’s statements (verbal information) as well as the various participant expressions and gestures (non-verbal information) that emerged during the interview. Step 4: separate the significant statements. This process was done by coding the participant statements that had a significant meaning as listed verbatim. Step 5: formulate the meaning of each significant statement. The researchers fully used the participants’ point of view, putting aside all of their own knowledge, assumptions, and personal experience. Step 6: categorize each unit of meaning into a theme of meaning. Step 7: integrate each theme into a complete description. Step 8: validate the results of the analysis with the participants. The results obtained from the data analysis process were then given to the participants to be reviewed and checked with the participants’ experiences and feelings. Step 9: refine the analysis results with the data obtained during the validation process (Creswell, 2013).

The author involved two of their colleagues for an external examination of the research interpretation process to validate the findings, to discuss the different perspectives, and to clarify the “bias of researchers” that might have influenced the process of data interpretation. The research team met at three points in the research interpretation process (i.e. beginning, middle, and end) to discuss and to reach a consensus on the findings and whether the data had achieved saturation. If different perspectives arose, further discussions were conducted until a full consensus was reached (Creswell, 2012, 2013).

Ethical approval

The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing Universitas Airlangga gave the Ethical Approval for this research (Ethical Approval No. 521-KEPK). Participation was voluntary and each participant signed an informed consent form before participating. The participants were given pseudonyms. All of the research documents were stored in a locked cabinet in the main author’s office, and all electronic copies were password protected.

Findings

The results of this study yielded 5 themes and 13 subthemes. A summary of the themes is presented in Table II.

Table II Themes of the study		
<i>No.</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>
1	Responses during “grandparenting”	1. Happiness 2. Upset to grandchildren 3. Tired
2	Strategies for overcoming negative responses	1. Massage 2. Rest/sleep 3. Going to the health center
3	Grandparents’ role	1. Fulfilling the physical needs of grandchildren 2. Fulfilling the educational needs of grandchildren
4	Reasons for making decision to raise grandchildren	1. Help 2. Reluctance to allow the raising of the grandchildren by another 3. Saving money
5	Cultural aspects	1. Traditional practice of raising their grandchildren 2. Traditional practice of helping their children

Responses during “grandparenting”

We concluded that there were three subthemes for grandparents’ responses: happy, tired and upset. The happy subtheme was described by participants:

I feel one thing. I thank God because of my old age. He still gives me the happiness of having grandchildren. I am grateful and happy [...] (Participant (P) 5).

Yes, I’m so happy. I can take the grandchildren out, educate them, and give them direction. I am really happy [...] (P10).

The second subtheme, feeling upset during “grandparenting” was described by participants:

When my grandson is fussy, I feel tired and sometimes I get angry. Sometimes I’ve already picked him up, but he still cries. Sometimes I cry with him if he doesn’t stop crying or when I fell sleepy but he doesn’t want to sleep. It makes me upset [...] (P2).

The last subtheme, feeling tired, was described by participants:

[...] if I’m tired, I sleep. Sometimes, I close my store if I’m dizzy. This is just an ordinary thing [...] (P8).

Mmmm, I certainly feel tired. Sometimes I fall asleep in front of the television [...] (P13).

Strategies for overcoming negative responses

Strategies for overcoming negative responses include massage, rest/sleep and going to the Health Center. The subtheme of massage was described by a participant:

If I’m getting tired, I usually ask my child to take me to a masseuse, or if I go to sleep, I ask my child to massage my body. It’s relaxing for me. The next day, I feel refreshed [...] (P2).

The subtheme of rest/sleep was described by participants:

If I’m tired, I take a rest. We have to manage our time, so if my grandchild is asleep, I sleep too [...] (P9).

[...] I take a rest, when I feel tired. I try to manage rest and activity [...] (P10).

The subtheme of going to health center was described by participants:

If I feel tired, I take a rest. However, if it becomes worse, I go to the Puskesmas[3] (Local Health Service Center) (P1).

Mmm, if I feel very tired, I go to the Puskesmas. They measure my blood pressure, uric acid, and cholesterol [...] (P13).

Grandparent’s role

The grandparent’s role was divided into two subthemes: fulfilling the physical needs of grandchildren and fulfilling educational needs of grandchildren. The subtheme “fulfilling the physical needs of grandchildren” was described by participants:

I take care of my grandchild by myself, giving him milk, carrying him and sleeping with him [...] (P4) (P8).

I do everything for him. I sleep with him, feed him, take him to school, and play with him from the morning until his parents come home [...] (P7).

The subtheme “fulfilling the educational needs of grandchildren” was described by a participant:

I was involved in raising her from her birth up until the age of 3. I educate her on how to wash her hand, eat, and all about hygiene education. Then, I introduced her to religion, such as how to pray. I told to her ways to pray, such as dhuhur, ashar and maghrib [...] (P5).

Reasons for making the decision to raise their grandchildren

Three subthemes were concluded from the interview sessions. The subtheme of Help was described by a participant:

Oh yes, actually my own child didn’t ask me to raise my grandchildren, but I saw that my son was so occupied, so I decided to raise my grandchild myself [...] (P13).

The subthemes of reluctance to allow the raising of the grandchildren by another was described by participants:

[...] if my grandchildren were raised by another, I think that it would not be a good thing [...] (P3).

Yes, I raise him by myself as a grandma. Actually, I would give him to others, but I could not [...] (P9).

The subtheme of saving money was described by participants:

If my grandchild is cared for by others, we have to pay. Instead of paying them. I think that it's better if we keep the money for other needs [...] (P8).

In my opinion, it would be better if they live with me than rent a house. They can save money first. If they save enough, they can buy land or a house [...] (P5).

Cultural aspects

Two subthemes were concluded that related to the traditional practice of raising grandchildren and helping the parents. The first subthemes were described by participants:

Indeed it is, so accept it. Before, I raised my grandchild; my mother raised my sons too [...] (P2).

It's like a tradition. Grandparents have always raised their grandchildren [...] (P1).

The second subthemes were described by a participant:

As his parent, I will always give him anything that I can to help him. There is no limit to helping our children, because we want our children to live happily. So, helping my child to raise my grandchild is a way of helping my son [...] (P5).

Discussion

The grandparents in this study depicted unique roles of grandparent in raising their grandchildren. They feel happy, tired, and upset when raising their grandchildren. This finding is consistent with the research that was conducted by Leung and Fung (2014) on Chinese families. In the study, the researchers found the experiences of grandparents caring for their grandchildren were a mixture of fun and hard work. The grandparents told happy stories and they enjoyed the closeness with their grandchildren (Leung and Fung, 2014).

The happiness of raising a grandchild may have appeared because none of the participants in this study felt compelled to do so. In this study, the grandparents were the ones who decided to help their children by helping to take care of their grandchildren. In addition, the parents were still alive and around to share the responsibility of parenting. The grandparents in this study cared for their grandchildren for at least 8 h each day while the parents were working. However, they could still rest when their children came home from work or when they felt tired. Furthermore, the average age of the grandparents was 63.87 years, which is categorized as "early older adult." This is in line with the research conducted by Tang *et al.* (2016), which stated that the compulsion to raise a grandchild can bring about negative feelings and experiences. Negative experiences can leave caregivers vulnerable to psychological and physical disorders, one of which is stress/fatigue (Tang *et al.*, 2016; Xu *et al.*, 2017).

The responses in this study were not burdensome for them. They were able to find strategies to overcome the negative responses. The strategies were massage, rest/sleep and going to the local health center. A prolonged period of "grandparenting," more than five days per week in Australia, China, and the USA, is associated with the increased stress, decreased mental health, and decreased cognition of the grandparents (Campbell *et al.*, 2016). In European countries, "grandparenting" has a positive impact on the health of older adults, especially grandmothers (Campbell *et al.*, 2016; Glaser *et al.*, 2014). In more detail, Di Gessa *et al.* (2016) mentioned that the older adults in the USA who act as the primary caregivers of grandchildren are more likely to encounter health losses. In Taiwan and the USA, there are reported improvements in health, well-being, and behavior related to alcohol abstinence in older adult, regardless of the duration of parenting (Campbell *et al.*, 2016). It is necessary to regulate the intensity of and time spent caregiving by older adults in order to maintain the benefits of staying active and healthy while aging (Campbell *et al.*, 2017).

Grandparents have an important role in their grandchildren's lives. According to this research, the grandparent's role is to help fulfill any physical needs and to educate their grandchildren. This role is carried out by the grandparents and parents alike. These results are similar to those from the research conducted by Muller and Litwin (2011), stating that the role of the grandparent is directly related to the distribution of responsibilities between the families and the welfare system in the context of caring for the younger generation. Other studies found that the grandparents were ready to take on the responsibility and even be the custodial caregiver because they felt obliged to do so (Jendrek, 1993). Grandparents feel responsible for their grandchildren's education, as noted by Participant 12. They strive to provide the best education possible so that their grandchildren will become part of a good generation in society. Good parenting has a positive impact on children. In the research conducted by Nursalam *et al.* (2007), most of the adolescents who had been imprisoned in Indonesia had bad experiences in their lives, such as family relationship lacking harmony, and communication (Nursalam *et al.*, 2007).

Grandparents' reasons for raising their grandchildren vary depending on culture. In Western cultures, like the USA, grandparents act as "nannies" for their grandchildren when their children have problems (e.g. substance abuse, detention, teenage pregnancy, emotional problems) or have died (Clotney *et al.*, 2015; Hayslip, 2014; Hayslip and Kaminski, 2005). "Grandparenting" is usually not a choice. It is used to solve problems. Thus, in this context, the grandparents feel the burden of raising their grandchildren (Hayslip and Kaminski, 2005). In Asian cultures, like in China, the grandparents usually prefer to take care of their grandchildren because of cultural traditions that highlight family harmony and collective well-being, including intergenerational exchanges, family responsibilities and social expectations (Chen and Liu, 2012). In this study, all of the grandparents made the decision to raise their grandchildren. The participants wanted to help their children to raise their grandchildren. They did not want them raised by another. A study in Indonesia found that the grandparents were more comfortable when they raised their grandchildren rather than allowing them to be raised by others. They were worried that their grandchildren would be mistreated, be taught improper manners, and become closer to the nanny than their parents (Wahyuni and Abidin, 2015).

Positive outlooks on raising grandchildren in the Javanese culture are a strong foundation for grandparents to draw upon when assisting in the parenting role. In the Javanese culture, parenting is a tradition with the aim of helping the child. The view of Javanese grandparents is helping their children as part of the obligation of being a parent, even though the children already have their own families. They said that the phenomenon of "grandparenting" is not only happening now; they also entrusted their children to their parents in the past. "Grandparenting" is something normal and common in Indonesia. This finding is consistent with Tang *et al.*'s (2016) research in the context of Chinese culture. The majority of grandparents reported no burden related to "grandparenting." For them, "grandparenting" was a family obligation that promoted family solidarity and ensures support for their children. They took care of their grandchildren to help their working children and to raise their grandchildren. Other studies in China have also found similar results; grandparents in the Chinese culture see themselves as being an important support for their families, especially in relation to raise the grandchildren. This role prevented the grandparents from feeling depressed and improved their well-being (Zhou *et al.*, 2017).

Conclusion

"Grandparenting" in Java provides a positive experience and a happy feeling for grandparents. However, many studies have found that it has a negative effect on the physical health of grandparents in the USA and Australia (Di Gessa *et al.*, 2016). The role of grandparents in this study was reported to be fulfilling the educational and physical needs of the grandchildren. Raising grandchildren is a responsibility shared by grandparents and parents.

In the end, "grandparenting" can be a burden, a source of happiness, or both depending in part on the grandparents' self-assessment of their parenting experience. Informal support systems and social and health services are essential to help the grandparents maintain their well-being when raising their grandchildren.

Limitation of study

The first limitation of this study was that the participants were limited to grandparents who raised only one grandchild under five years old. Exploration needs to be done on grandparents with more than one grandchild and older grandchildren in order to explore the possibility of conflict. Second, qualitative research methods are unable to provide generalizations for larger populations. However, the information provides direction for future studies, such as on the predictor of intergenerational conflict and on the perceptions of the grandparents' role in the Javanese culture. Third, this study does not provide information about the health of the grandparent at the time of raising their grandchildren, because the researchers did not perform basic health checks.

Notes

1. Containing people who received training from a Puskesmas (Local Health Services Center) to help health workers promote health in the community.
2. RW is a sub-section of the village that consists of 15–150 families.
3. Puskesmas is Pusat Kesehatan Masyarakat or in English similar with Local Health Service Center.

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